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SUBJECT: MFA COMMENTS ON COTE D'IVOIRE, TOGO AND CHAD

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah B. Rosenblatt. Reas
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11. Summary: MFA AF DAS-Equivalent Bruno Foucher on September 12 said President Chirac would call attention to the financial cost of French support for Operation Licorne in Cote d'Ivoire in upcoming UN meetings and indicate the possibility of an adjustment to French force deployment if the peace process remains in gridlock. Regarding the September visits of the Togolese and Chadian Presidents to France, Foucher said there were no major developments, however he voiced satisfaction that Faure had gained legitimacy as head of state and that Deby had also managed to consolidate his position. End Summary.

Cote d'Ivoire: Status Quo Not Worth the Price Tag

12. (C) MFA AF DAS-Equivalent Bruno Foucher told Africa Watcher on September 12 that French President Chirac would aim next week at the UN to underscore French dissatisfaction at the high fiscal burden posed by continuing French military presence through Operation Licorne in support of the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI). The Licorne deployment has cost France about one billion euro since the crisis erupted in 2002, according to Foucher. Chirac, he indicated, hoped to capitalize on a joint UNSC-African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) meeting in New York on September 19 in order to jump-start the reconciliation process in Cote d'Ivoire. But without real headway towards a political resolution, France would look to draw down the costly Licorne force and could envisage alteration of the Licorne and UNOCI mandates when next reviewed by the UN Security Council (UNSC) in December 2006, according to Foucher.

13. (C) Foucher offered a positive assessment of the September 8 Communique of the International Working Group in Abidjan, positing that it had adumbrated a path forward for Cote d'Ivoire after the parties inevitably miss the target of elections in October 2006. Foucher said the international strategy now should entail: i) reinforcement of the Prime Minister's authority; ii) ending the implicit duality between the powers of the President and Prime Minister; and iii) establishing a High Level Consultative Committee that would, in effect, be a means to remove difficult parties from the government while advancing dialog. Foucher said France would look favorably on allowing Gbagbo to maintain his presidential title as a ceremonial function without actual governing authority.

Togo: Faure Gains Credibility as Head of State

¶4. (C) Foucher was highly satisfied by developments on Togo. President Faure's September visits to France and to the European Union had been a success. Faure's meeting with EU Commission President Barroso was especially pivotal, for it accorded Faure legitimacy as head of state. Contrary to media reports, Faure's talks with the French had not covered the supposedly imminent nomination of a Prime Minister, Foucher claimed. One cause for concern, according to Foucher, was Faure's unilateral announcement to schedule legislative elections for 8 June 2007. This was a misstep, inviting opposition indignation, because Faure was supposed to coordinate a joint announcement with the opposition, Foucher said. Another turning point for Togo watchers could be Faure's November 2006 trip to Germany, Foucher suggested.

Deby in Paris

¶5. (C) Foucher said Chadian President Idriss Deby had visited France in September in a personal capacity. Deby nonetheless had meetings with President Chirac, FM Douste-Blazy, Minister-Delegate for Cooperation Girardin, Minister of Defense Alliot-Marie and Minister of Interior Sarkozy. Deby's position was noticeably stronger than six months ago, he declared. Foucher called attention to the thousand or so Chadian rebels who had just crossed the border with Sudan to return to Chad. He speculated that these rebels were mostly of the Tama ethnicity and they had been left in the lurch by Sudanese President Bashir, who had discontinued his support. Deby was making headway in bringing Zaghawa rebels back into the fold, thanks to increased availability of funds, giving Deby greater

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negotiating latitude. Foucher nonetheless discounted the notion that Bashir had ended his designs on destabilizing Chad. Foucher further mentioned that a cabinet reshuffle in Chad was in the works,

¶6. (C) Comment: Given Deby's close ties to Chirac, it is unlikely that the Chadian President would call on Minister of Interior Sarkozy without Chirac's consent. Foucher, who is awaiting his transfer to Chad as the next French ambassador, insisted that French policy in the region would not change should Sarkozy succeed Chirac as French President in 2007. Foucher's comment runs contrary to the received wisdom that current French policy on Chad is based on Chirac's personal ties to Deby. While Sarkozy is seeking to expand his own African base, he cannot expect and perhaps would not even wish for Chirac's unrivaled network of friendships built over decades of contact with Africa. Significant changes in French African policy remain likely once Chirac steps down as President, regardless of his successor.

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